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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: MOST SAN CHOOSE ASSISTANCE OVER TRADITION

REF: GABORONE 235

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. NOT FOR INTERNET POSTING.

¶1. (SBU) Summary. PolOff traveled with a San guide to the ghost town of Xade, a former San settlement within the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) as well as the village of New Xade, a new San community near but outside the reserve. New Xade's population is almost entirely dependent on GOB assistance and has few economic opportunities. Both government officials and PolOff's San guide cited lack of economic opportunities, geographic isolation and a lack of motivation in the San community to move off of public assistance as major stumbling blocks to development in New Xade. Members of the San community are enthusiastic about new talks with the GOB about economic development, residency, and hunting rights. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Ghanzi District is a large, sparsely-populated area in the west of Botswana, sharing a border with Namibia and including the vast Central Kalahari Game Reserve. According to the 2001 census, Ghanzi District has 32,000 residents, many of whom are categorized as destitute. In February, PolOff traveled to Ghanzi to meet with government officials, NGOs, and representatives of the Basarwa minority ethnic group (who live in Ghanzi District in greater numbers than in other Botswana Districts). The Basarwa are commonly referred to as the San or "San Bushmen" in the Western media, although the San in the CKGR refer to themselves as Kua, which is a clan name. PolOff's meeting with local government officials was reported in reftel.

¶3. (SBU) PolOff spent a day visiting the San communities of Xade and New Xade. Xade is a now-abandoned village that was previously inhabited by the San inside the CKGR. New Xade is the settlement outside the reserve where many of those resettled San now live. PolOff was escorted by a San guide, Mr. Jumanda, who was formerly an employee of the First People of the Kalahari organization (FPK). The FPK is the group who successfully sued the GOB for the right for San to live within the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Mr. Jumanda was a party to the lawsuit and is thus permitted to live in the CKGR, but he currently chooses to live in the town of Ghanzi.

Living Conditions in New Xade

¶4. (U) Arriving in New Xade, a town of about 2500 residents, PolOff's first stop was New Xade's health clinic. The clinic is small and has three nurses. As we arrived on a Tuesday, the day that the doctor visits from Ghanzi, the clinic was busy with about 25 patients waiting to be seen. The clinic,

one of 22 in Ghanzi District, is able to offer only basic services like distribution of medicines (including antiretroviral treatment for HIV/AIDS), childhood vaccinations, and minor checkups. For more serious medical needs New Xade residents must travel to Ghanzi, which is about an hour away along a sandy road. There is no public transportation between the two towns, although a clinic vehicle is available to transport medical patients to appointments.

¶15. (U) In addition to the clinic, New Xade has a primary school (the nearest secondary school is in Ghanzi). The school's name, "Kjoe" means beautiful, and the enthusiastic headmistress who has been at the school less than a year is very proud of her school and her 602 students. She is most proud of the "sevens" test scores that were just reported for Kjoe. (These are the tests that students take just before graduating to secondary school). Kjoe had an 80% pass rate, which was the second highest in the district and the ninth highest out of the over 80 schools in the region.

¶16. (U) While the headmistress reports that her school is well supplied with books, uniforms and food, she does say that there are many challenges for her. Her largest challenge is perception by many parents, especially in the San community, that their children derive no benefit from attending school. The headmistress says that she spends a lot of her time promoting community involvement with the school and convincing parents to re-enroll their children in school after they drop out. The main reason that the children drop out is that they are living in the hostels at the school and miss their family. Boarding students are

GABORONE 00000240 002 OF 003

brought to school at the beginning of term and are only returned to their families when term ends.

¶17. (U) At Kjoe, about 300 of the 602 students live in the hostels, which are segregated by age and sex. The clean but sparsely furnished bedrooms are set up like large dorm rooms with small rooms off to the side for studies. There is only one full-time woman employed to watch the children at the hostels and she lives in a house close to, but not a part of the hostel. There was also a sports room and an entertainment room at the hostel, but neither looked much used or had much equipment.

¶18. (SBU) Most people living in New Xade receive food rations from the GOB and are classified as destitute. The GOB has encouraged income-generating programs for the residents, but residents complain that the project ideas are not quite right, are not workable or are not what they want to do. Other residents say that they would prefer to keep receiving the GOB handout. PolOff's guide opined that the San were "basically becoming a class of welfare recipients." He said this was caused when they were moved to a town where the San could not take care of their own needs. But he also added "the San seem to be losing their drive to take care of themselves and are growing comfortable with the government programs."

Xade: CKGR Ghost Town

¶19. (U) Mr. Jumanda, a San guide, took PolOff to visit the traditional San village of Xade, which has essentially been abandoned since the San were moved out of the CKGR. Xade is located about 2-3 hours inside the CKGR on a deep sand road, which is often impassable during the rainy season. Jumanda had grown up in Xade and he described what life had been like for the community. The town was established by the GOB in the late 1970's and grew to a population of about 700 residents. Though the San had historically lived in small groups scattered throughout the CKGR, Mr. Jumanda said that almost all of the CKGR San moved to Xade over time. They

still left Xade for occasional hunting trips, but also raised goats in town. In addition to houses, the GOB provided a wide range of government services. There was a primary school (equipped with teacher's housing), a clinic, a community development center, government buildings (for government benefits workers such as food distributors, to work out of while they were in town once a week), a town meeting center, a borehole, and two water faucets. To service all of these facilities the GOB built an airstrip and (at huge expense) all GOB personnel, food, gas for the borehole pump and engineers to repair the borehole were flown in once a week. In 1996, the GOB decided to move the population from Xade to another settlement outside the CKGR. Our guide added that the San residents of Xade were not very upset to be resettled as a "a lot of lions were eating the donkeys." (Note: One of the reasons the GOB gave for this relocation was the tremendous cost in providing services to the community while it was in such a isolated location. End Note)

San Guide's Views on FPK Lawsuit, Resettlement

¶10. (SBU) Mr. Jumanda stated that he felt that most of the San who were interested in living in the CKGR had been a party to FPK's lawsuit against the GOB and had therefore been granted the right of return to the CKGR. He did not think there were many other members of the San community who wanted to live in the CKGR but were unable to do so. More likely, he said was that there were some people who would like to return to the CKGR, but only if the full compliment of government services that had been available in Xade were again available. He pointed out that although many people in New Xade that were wearing "I Love CKGR" shirts and that the town's football (soccer) team was called the "Tears of the Kalahari," most of them had not joined in the lawsuit.

¶11. (U) There are approximately 300 San people who were party to the lawsuit brought by FPK. By court order they, their spouses and minor children are allowed to return to the CKGR to live year round. Normally, however, even those San allowed to live in CKGR only go into the reserve once the rainy season begins, usually in December through April. Once inside the reserve, they live in grass huts and eat

GABORONE 00000240 003 OF 003

watermelons, tubers and millet. During the rest of the year, most San stay outside the CKGR and reside with family members who live full time outside the CKGR.

¶12. (SBU) Mr. Jumanda's main criticisms of the current situation with the San are that he feels that they are overly dependent on handouts and are "set up to fail". He also thinks that there are many unfair policies in place by the GOB and that the government is not representative? of the San. He feels that a lot of discrimination still exists against the San, especially against children in the school system. Finally, he criticized that the income generating projects that were set up did not bring as much money as they should back to the community. He pointed to the example of Ghanzi Craft, which is a craft shop in Ghanzi that sells the crafts made by the San, for not sending back all of the money that customers pay the store for crafts back to the San community. (Note: PolOff met with the owner of Ghanzi Craft, who readily admitted that she marked up the craft items by about 100% from what the San were paid. She said this money was used for overhead at the store, including rent, salaries for three full time employees and a computer systems for inventory control.)

¶13. (SBU) However, even with these criticisms, the guide was enthusiastic about the prospect of renewed talks between the GOB and the San people. If talks are renewed, then Mr. Jumanda plans to again join with the FPK and work within the CKGR as a community organizer. His goal, he says, would be to help build consensus within the San community to help with

negotiations with the GOB. In his opinion, the main issues he would like the government to discuss are hunting rights within the CKGR, providing boreholes for the San in the CKGR and equity issues for San living outside the CKGR. Mr. Jumanda was also enthusiastic about government plans to run electricity to New Xade, to add running water to the houses in New Xade and the expansion of New Xade's clinic. He notes that New Xade was getting more infrastructure improvements than other San settlements and wondered if New Xade was getting these items only because they were raising the issues more loudly than other settlements.

COMMENT

¶14. (U) COMMENT: The GOB is now offering a choice for members of the San community. For those members who fought for their right to return to the CKGR, they may live in the CKGR, but must do so without GOB-provided infrastructure or health and education resources. The GOB argues that it is simply too costly to provide extensive government services in a remote location like the CKGR. The San's second choice is to live outside the CKGR, in settlements or in towns of their choosing, and take advantage of the full complement of GOB services.

¶15. (SBU) It appears that the San began moving away from their traditional lifestyle when they began living in the settlement of Xade within the CKGR, where they began to grow accustomed to GOB services being provided and started to pursue more farming activities. This has resulted in a split in the San community, where younger members are more accustomed to a more modern way of living and seem less willing to live in a traditional manner while older members of the community still embrace the traditional way of life. It seems likely that as the older generation passes on that the younger San will be less concerned with living a traditional lifestyle, but will look more towards government supported protections of San traditions, rights to hunt and continued government support through equalizing opportunities and providing services.

¶16. (SBU) Though it is highly unlikely that the GOB will offer to provide services in the CKGR, the government would be wise to increase its efforts to improve economic opportunities and continue its infrastructure improvements to San communities like New Xade and to help combat the feelings of marginalization. If the proposed talks between the San and the GOB take place, and don't become the heated arguments that occurred in the past, this could also go a long way toward easing tensions between the San community and the GOB.

Post will report on these discussions as appropriate. END

COMMENT.
NOLAN